

Levy is the  
mate blues  
ard player..."

**A**LL THROUGH  
his career, from  
his teenage years  
with Albert and B.B.  
King to his tenure with  
Roomful Of Blues and  
his current gig as a  
house producer and  
sessionman for Bullseye  
Blues, Ron Levy has  
been a big fan of the  
Hammond B-3 organ.  
Naturally, he is pleased  
to see that the hulking  
instrument is making  
a strong comeback  
with the emergence of  
the acid-jazz scene.

"I think jazz just got into this thing for a while where it was heady and experimental and everybody just tried to show off their virtuosity...chops for the sake of chops," says Levy. "I think it alienated people for a while. And I'm glad to see that jazz is becoming more popular through this jazz-with-a-beat kind of thing."

Levy's own contribution to the genre is *Zoo Zoo Zoo* (Bullseye), a collection of funky B-3 grooves in the company of guitarist Melvin Sparks, bassist Stanley Burks, percussionist Ralph Dorsney, horn players Ray Greene and Gordon Beadle and quintessential funky drummer Idris Muhammad. Recorded at Rudy Van Gelder's studio and produced by longtime B-3 enthusiast Bob Porter, it moves from charred shuffles like "C.C. Rider" to undulating grooves like "U Rockin' Me" and the funky title track, from a swinging rendition of Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue" to the Latin-flavored "Silver Cannonball," Levy's tribute to two towering influences, Horace Silver and Cannonball Adderley.

"I think the songwriting on this one is a little jazzier than what most people know me for," he says. "I joke when I say I'm probably one of the only people in the world who has done blues for commercial reasons, because I've just always worked in that blues vein. But myself, I've always loved jazz and R&B more."

Levy is quick to point out that his infectious brand of instrumental 'acid blues' is catching on in the clubs. "We've been able to hold the audience without vocals. People been dancing to it, groovin' to it. What more can you ask for?"

— Bill Milkowski



Ron Levy

Jazz Times -September 1996

"The Wild Kingdom rips up preconceptions and leads listeners  
down new musical paths..."

# LEVY.

## The Master of the B-3 Fleashes Out His Resumé

by Karl Bremer

I pulled all the records with Ron Levy's name on them out of my collection, there'd be a sizable gap on the wall. This cat's name is everywhere: producer, session player, bandleader, songwriter, label-owner.

Here's a guy who started playing with B.B. King at the age of 18. He's got a musical rap sheet seven pages long, featuring work with everyone from Bo Diddley and Champion Jack Dupree to Lowell Fulson and Smokin' Joe Kubek. Through his own co-founded Cannonball Records label and others, he's launched — or relaunched — the careers of a whole gang of blues and jazz artists, young and old. And he fronts his own band on his weapon of choice, the Hammond B-3 organ.

Just reading Levy's bio is exhausting. Yet he talks like he's just getting his second wind.

"I feel like I'm 18 years old again," Levy exclaims during a recent interview. Part of the reason for his new-found enthusiasm is the re-formation of his "acid-blues" band, Wild Kingdom, a seductive amalgam of blues, jazz and funk with a dash of Memphis-flavored R&B propelled by Levy's soulful organ grooves. Of all the musical hats he's worn, he says, "I have to say that me actually playing music does come first.

I've expenoced an this energy for all these other various companies and artists and producing everyone else; it's probably high time I do something for myself."

Levy dove back into his Wild Kingdom project after losing his stake in Cannonball Records this year in what he describes as a "hostile takeover" by his partner. "It was taken away from me, and I have to say it broke my heart. It was one of those classic examples of the creative guy versus the business guy," says Levy; the "creative guy" in the partnership.

Cannonball exploded on the scene in 1997 and within a year spawned 18 releases featuring some of the freshest names in blues — Bernard Allison, Shawn Pittman, James Harman — as well as some respected older names such as Johnnie Bassett and Melvin Sparks. "It was a lot different than any other record company I ever worked with. It was more like an artist-run label," says Levy.

"They afforded me an opportunity to record a lot of good stuff. I got a chance to bring some real good people to the forefront, like Johnny Bassett and Shawn Pittman, and got to record a lot of my jazz friends and idols," he continues. "All the musicians and I appreciate the opportunity Cannonball gave us. We wish it had worked out better."